The Incarnate Christ
Interview Transcript

I'm Rhonda Lynn and I'm here interviewing Robert Von Schriltz, the author of the book *The Incarnate Christ: An Engineer's Quest to Define the Person of Christ*.

Q1: Hi Robert. Can you tell the audience about yourself and your book.

Thank you, Rhonda, for this opportunity.

While my book discusses a very theological topic, I am not a professional theologian or a university professor. Neither do I represent a particular church or denomination. I am a born-again, Bible-believing Christian that enjoys wrestling with theological issues.

My background was in the secular world. I worked as an engineer for 38 years in various engineering environments. Currently, I am retired. So I think more like an engineer than a theologian.

My book is an attempt to develop a biblically sound one-nature theory of the incarnate Christ. A one-nature theory means that Jesus is a distinct person with one mind, one will, and one set of emotions.

Q2: Who is your target audience?

In a narrow sense, it is university and seminary professors that discuss such matters.

In a broad sense, any Bible-believing Christian that is concerned about what the church believes about God and Christ.

Since the Christian church at large holds a particular position on the person of Christ, it is important to know what it is and why.

The average person in the pews might not know about this, but all pastors who hold to the historic Christian faith affirm a particular theory of the incarnate Christ. At Christian seminaries and universities, students are taught "orthodox" theology. Specifically, they are taught the two-nature theory of the incarnate Christ.

The orthodox two-nature theory is grounded in early-church creeds. These creeds are formal faith statements that were hammered out in the third and fourth centuries of the Common Era. These creeds were created by Gentile Christian theologians with a background in Greek philosophy and Greek thought.

It is important to know that the orthodox theory of the incarnate Christ shows up periodically in sermons and Bible studies. You may hear that Jesus is "fully God and fully man." The usual underpinning of this statement is the orthodox two-nature theory of the incarnate Christ.

It is also important to know that the orthodox two-nature theory is exactly what it claims to be – a theory. It was made by man for man. Like all theories, it contains some speculation and error, and thus can be improved upon. It is also possible that it can be replaced by something better.

Q3: Before you describe your solution, could you elaborate on the two-nature theory. How does the church at large define the person of Christ?

The orthodox position of the church today is the two-nature theory of the incarnate Christ. Christ is one person with two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. His divine nature has a divine mind, will, and emotions. It has all divine attributes, such as omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. His human nature has a human mind, will, and emotions. It has all human attributes, which are limited like ours. This position is often summed up as follows: Jesus Christ is "fully God and fully man."

How do these natures operate together? From here, things get very complicated. It is not my purpose to go into this now. Most theological volumes will attempt to explain the two-nature theory, and how his natures function in harmony with one another. It is important to note that this theory has unresolved problems.

Q4: Why did the early-church theologians reject the one-nature theory?

Some would say that the one-nature theory of the incarnate Christ is deficient based on purely biblical grounds. Others would say that Jesus must have two natures to be qualified to perform his redemptive work and save humanity. Neither criticism is true. The rejection of the one-nature theory is rooted in methodology. That is, how one approaches the task at hand.

The approach will, to a great extent, determine the solution that appears best. Thus, I contend that it was the approach to the problem that led the early-church theologians to reject the one-nature theory.

Q5: Could you please explain this further?

Let me summarize the approach of the early-church theologians with three steps.

STEP 1: Jesus is God.

The early-church theologians saw the deity of Jesus Christ in the writings of the New Testament. He is fully God in and of himself. As God, Jesus has a divine nature, with a divine mind, will, and emotions. He has all divine attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

This created an obvious problem: Since the Father is God and Jesus is God, how can there be one God? How do you avoid the conclusion that there are two Gods?

STEP 2: Construct a new concept of God.

Listen carefully to this quote by Alister Mcgrath: "Thus the recognition that Jesus is God immediately modifies any view of God which is incapable of coping with this insight. The history of the development of Christian doctrine shows this pattern clearly: Once the full divinity of Jesus Christ was accepted as normative in the fourth century, the process of re-thinking the doctrine of God began in earnest. The culmination of this process is the doctrine of the Trinity." A. E. McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 343.

Alister Mcgrath's statement is absolutely correct. He says that the deity of Christ led to a new doctrine of God – the trinity.

The doctrine of the trinity is as follows: God is three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) of one substance (or essence).

STEP 3: Construct a two-nature theory of the incarnate Christ.

Since Jesus is divine, how do you explain the all-to-human Jesus in the pages of the New Testament? The answer is to assign him an additional nature, that is, a human nature with limited human attributes.

The path of theological development is as follows: The deity of Jesus Christ led to a new doctrine of God (i.e., the trinity), then to the orthodox two-nature theory. Thus Jesus has two natures, one human and the other divine. He has two minds, two wills, and two sets of emotions.

It is important to note that this approach moves in a backwards direction. God is redefined based on New Testament evidence, and this new concept of God is read back into the Old Testament. The early-church theologians believed they discovered something new about God, something that was unknown to the people of the Old Testament. They claim that the one true God was, is, and always will be a trinity.

Q6: What did the early-church theologians get right?

For our purposes here, I would like to point out two very important things the early-church theologians got right.

1. They recognized the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

2. They affirmed that Jesus is called God in the New Testament.

They are right on both counts. I also affirm both truths, though my understanding of the trinity and why Jesus is called God differ. I believe that the early-church theologians incorrectly defined what the trinity is and what Jesus' deity means.

Importantly, the affirmation of these two truths separates my one-nature theory from other one-nature theories, like, for example, the Jehovah Witnesses. All other one-nature theories I know of do not affirm these two biblical truths.

Q7: What is the problem with the orthodox solution?

There are a lot of ways I can answer this question, but I would like to limit my answer to just two things. Here are two critical issues, each issue creates a serious problem for the orthodox view.

ISSUE 1: It creates a new concept of God.

A person who creates a god creates an idol, like the golden calf that was created at the foot of Mount Sinai. A person who worships a man-made concept of god is an idolater. No one would argue with this.

Does this apply to the orthodox position? It appears so. The doctrine of the trinity created by the church is a "man-made" concept of God. It is by definition an idol, and to worship this concept of God is idolatry.

ISSUE 2: It creates a single being with two natures.

It is one thing to state this theory; it is another to explain how it works. Jesus' two natures are very different; thus conflict is unavoidable. An infinite nature and finite nature are not compatible with one another. To say that Jesus is omniscient and lacking knowledge is a difficult problem to say the least.

This is a problem that is not created by the biblical writers, but by the makers of the two-nature theory. No one has resolved this problem in over 1,500 years. Is this a mystery or a mistake?

Like the engine warning light in a car, I believe that this problem is an indication that something is wrong with the two-nature theory.

Q8: Please give the audience a summary of your approach.

Like I did with the orthodox position, I will give three steps that describe my approach.

STEP 1: There is one true God called Father.

My theory does not start with the deity of Jesus Christ. I start with the concept of God that was assumed by all New Testament writers. There is one God with one personality, that is, Jewish monotheism.

STEP 2: Construct a concept of the trinity.

I construct a biblical concept of the trinity. It is centered on how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit relate to one another and to creation. This concept of the trinity is the foundation of my theological system.

STEP 3: Construct a one-nature theory of the incarnate Christ.

On the foundation, I construct a one-nature theory of the incarnate Christ. Jesus Christ is a person with one nature. He has one mind, one will, and one set of emotions.

The complete theory will then be tested on how well it interprets biblical passages that relate to the incarnate Christ's knowledge.

My book, *The Incarnate Christ*, is my journey to develop this theological system. I invite the reader along on the journey, to follow the process from start to finish, and to evaluate the proposed theory for oneself.

Q9: What is the fundamental difference between the orthodox approach and your approach?

We have different starting points; therefore, theological development will take different directions. The orthodox solution starts with the deity of Christ, and then redefines God. Having answered the God question, they develop a two-nature theory of the incarnate Christ. The proposed solution begins with Jewish monotheism, an existing concept of God. Starting here, I develop an understanding of the trinity, then a one-nature theory of the incarnate Christ.

The proposed solution accepts the Old Testament concept of God given by God, and tries to understand the New Testament in this light. The orthodox solution redefines God based on New Testament evidence, and reads the new man-made concept of God back into the Old Testament.

QUESTION: Should God define himself or should we define God?

Q10: Why is your solution better than the orthodox solution?

I believe the answer to this question is my starting point. Only God should define himself. When we define God, we create an idol.

I affirm the monotheism that was taught in the Old Testament, the monotheism that was current in the first century. This is the belief in God that Jesus and his followers held. I affirm Jesus' understanding of God, that there is one true God called Father. Subsequent theological development begins here. This is a truth that cannot be changed or altered. Thus God is allowed to define himself, and idolatry is averted. This is a solid starting point. Jesus must be understood in this light.

I also believe that the one-nature theory of the incarnate Christ presented in my book is more in line with the biblical data and the biblical context. It results in less problems and logical difficulties. I believe that it addresses Jesus' knowledge in a new and creative way, opening the door for fresh dialog.

Q11: If you accept Jewish monotheism as the starting point, how do you explain the passages that refer to Jesus as God?

Great question Rhonda. This is a complex issue, and much of my book addresses it. But let me point out something that will give the listener an indication of the direction that my solution will take.

Let's start with John 1:1 – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."

The Word is the preincarnate Christ, that is, Jesus as he existed before he came to earth as a human being.

Note the wording of this passage: the Word was "with God," followed by "was God," followed by "with God."

I believe that the biblical writer put these phrases together for a reason. The wording is telling us something important. You cannot define "was God" without "with God." These phrases together are the key to understanding Jesus' divine identity. Jesus with God is the basis for Jesus as God.

Q12: What challenges did you face formulating your solution?

My book mentions seven challenges, or hurdles I had to clear to write this book. I would like to mention just one here. At first, it was very difficult to be open to a position that the church has rejected. Those who affirmed a one-nature theory in the fourth century were called heretics. I had to wrestle with this issue. Ultimately, I had to decide if I am going to go with the flow or revisit this position anew? To consider this position anew, I had to come to the conclusion that doing so is not a sin or evil, no matter what others may think.

If I was going to be as objective as possible and truly consider a new solution, I needed to isolate myself from rejection by association.

Q13: What are the weaknesses of your solution?

In my experience, most people will not acknowledge the weakness of their position when they argue their case. Like a lawyer, they give the strengths of their position and the weaknesses of other positions. I do not want to be like this.

Every theory has an element of speculation. It's unavoidable. When writing my book, I tried my best to be open and honest. I pointed out speculation when I made speculation. It is important to know about the shortcomings and debatable matters of any theory. You cannot honestly judge a theory, and determine if it is a better theory than other theories, if all the cards are not on the table.

Q14: Who are your critics? How would you answer them?

For the most part, my critics are Christians who have a commitment to orthodox theology. People who are convinced that this issue is closed, that it has already been resolved in an adequate fashion.

Those in this camp have a standard argument against my position. They would say that my Jesus is deficient. He does not have a full divine nature and a full human nature, but a divine nature alone. It is important to know that this argument makes a big assumption. It assumes that the two-nature theory is correct. Since this is so, it uses the two-nature theory as the benchmark, a way to judge other theories. In effect, this approach is judging a theory by a theory. It is not rejecting the one-nature theory per se, but rejecting the one-nature theory because it is not the two-nature theory. Each theory should be judged by its own merits, and how well it integrates the biblical data.

I welcome constructive criticism. No theory is perfect, and all theories can be improved upon and explained more clearly.

The question is not whether a solution has speculation, but what is it speculating about? My position does not speculate on the nature of God. I affirm the concept of God that was accepted by all first-century Jews, including Jesus. There is one true God called Father. The Bible clearly states this. I am firm on this matter; it is not negotiable. New insight about the Messiah does not change this fact.

My challenge to those who hold the orthodox position of the trinity and the person of Christ is to make a careful and critical evaluation of this position – to accept the fact that it is redefining God, and that this theory offers a man-made concept of God. And to seriously wrestle with what it means to hold and worship a man-made concept of God. Also, to seriously consider the problems a two-nature theory presents, and what these problems say about the integrity of the two-nature theory. If the weaknesses of this solution are seen for what they are, there can be open and honest dialog about the possibility of a better solution.

Q15: What do you hope your solution will accomplish?

I hope to encourage like-minded truth-seekers to seriously consider a one-nature theory of the incarnate Christ.

It is my desire that someone will take my theory and make it better. Every theory can be improved upon.

Q16: How can the listeners get your book?

My book, *The Incarnate Christ*, third edition is available as an e-book. It is free on Google Books and Internet Archive.

I want to thank Robert Von Schriltz for taking the time to talk about his book *The Incarnate Christ: An Engineer's Quest to Define the Person of Christ*. It's been interesting discussing this topic. I hope the church takes your theory seriously, and is the better for it.

Thank you, Rhonda, for being such a gracious host. I appreciate this opportunity to present my position to the public.

The Incarnate Christ: An Engineer's Quest to Define the Person of Christ, third edition, is a free e-book on Google Books and Internet Archive.